

News



from the South Carolina Education Oversight Committee
P.O. Box 11867 • Room 227 Blatt Building
Columbia, South Carolina, 29211
Communications Office, (803) 734 - 6164

April 10, 2006
For Immediate Release

For more information, contact: Dana Yow, Director of Communications

EDITOR'S NOTE: The EOC meeting will begin at 1 p.m., Monday in Room 101 of the Solomon Blatt Building (corner of Assembly and Pendleton streets). A copy of the full Achievement Gap study is available on the EOC Web site at www.sceoc.org under "News." Principals from two of the identified schools have been invited to present information about their efforts to reduce the achievement gap. They are Dr. Stephen Ward of Rosewood Elementary in Rock Hill School District Three, and Dr. Cynthia Prigden of Woodland Heights Elementary in Spartanburg School District Six.

138 SC elementary and middle schools identified in EOC study as reducing the achievement gap

EOC renews call to action

Columbia – About 16 percent of South Carolina elementary and middle schools have been identified in a study released by the South Carolina Education Oversight Committee (EOC) Monday as reducing the achievement gap for at least one historically underachieving student group.

In the fourth annual achievement gap study which uses results of the 2005 Palmetto Achievement Challenge Tests (PACT), 138 elementary and middle schools out of 863 statewide were shown to have high overall student achievement for at least one target subgroup – African American students, Hispanic students, or students participating in the free/reduced price lunch program. The achievement gap was defined in the study as the difference in achievement between the target group (the historically lower-scoring demographic group) and the statewide comparison group (the historically higher-scoring group) at various PACT performance levels (Advanced, Proficient, Basic, and Below Basic.)

Overall, the study reveals little change during the past year in the gaps in achievement among different ethnic and socioeconomic student groups in South Carolina. Gaps between white and Hispanic students decreased. However, gaps in English Language Arts (ELA) and

math achievement between white and African American students and between free- or reduced-price lunch program and pay lunch students changed little between 2004 and 2005.

The largest gaps in achievement were observed on the PACT science test. Performance on the science and social studies PACT tests was analyzed in this year's report but schools will not be recognized for achievement in these content areas until next year.

EOC Research Director David Potter, who presented the study, renewed the call to action he made two years ago. Pointing to data which reveal that historically underachieving groups of students predominate the enrollments in schools rated *Below Average* and *Unsatisfactory*, Potter suggested that reducing the gap in these schools may require different strategies than the ones used in schools rated *Excellent*, *Good*, and *Average*.

"The challenge for high performing schools is to raise the achievement of their lower income and minority students while maintaining the high levels of achievement of their higher-scoring students," said Potter. "For low-performing schools, the challenge is raising the achievement of *all* groups."

Potter stated that this year's study again emphasizes the need for parents and the community to take strong, positive roles in the lives of young people and within schools in order to meet goals we have set for student achievement.

"The data indicate that what adults in schools and communities *do* makes a difference," stated Potter. "Schools can be successful in raising the achievement levels of all students to a high level regardless of the risk factors students bring to school with them."

Principals and staff from many of the schools were present to hear the report and to be recognized by the committee. Two of the principals – Stephen Ward of Rosewood Elementary in Rock Hill School District Three, and Cynthia Prigden of Woodland Heights Elementary in Spartanburg School District Six presented information about strategies and programs in their schools that they believe are reasons for their schools' success.

This year is the first year Woodland Heights Elementary has been recognized for its progress in reducing the achievement gap among student groups. Many schools recognized in previous years have maintained their accomplishment.

Dr. Prigden told the committee that interactive learning tailored to individual students was the most important strategy Woodland Heights was using to reduce the gap among student groups.

"Children can't get enough of learning at our school because we make it meaningful and active," said Dr. Prigden. "Our responsibility is to create a thirst for knowledge."

The EOC study focused on three areas:

1. The level of achievement gaps between the target groups and the comparison groups using 2002, 2003, 2004, and 2005 PACT data in ELA, mathematics, science, and social studies.
2. The degree to which a gap exists among demographic categories.
3. The identification and characteristics of schools that were reducing the achievement gap for at least one target group in at least one subject area.

Some of the study's findings were:

- Members of all student demographic groups scored higher in higher-achieving schools.
- There was very little change in ELA and math achievement in 2005, compared to 2004.
 - In both 2004 and 2005, one fourth of all students failed the ELA test and one-fourth failed the math test (scored *Below Basic*).
 - One-third of all students scored at the *Proficient* or *Advanced* level on the ELA test and one-third scored *Proficient* or *Advanced* on the math test.
- Gaps between white and African American students, while lower each year studied through 2004, remain consistently larger than gaps between pay and free- or reduced-price lunch students and between white and Hispanic students.
- Minimal progress has been made diminishing the gaps at the *Proficient* and *Advanced* levels for all of the student comparison groups.
- Achievement gaps at the *Proficient* or *Advanced* level in both ELA and math are larger in schools rated *Excellent* or *Good* than in schools rated *Below Average* or *Unsatisfactory*, indicating that disparities at higher levels of achievement are greater among the demographic groups than at lower achievement levels.
- Many of the schools recognized for closing the achievement gaps in 2005 were high-poverty schools.
 - Sixteen of the recognized schools had 90 percent or more of their students in poverty
- Using results from the 2005 surveys, parents, teachers, and students in the gap-reducing schools tend to be much more satisfied with the physical and social environment and with home and school relations than survey respondents from other schools.

The study provides an update on progress being made to address the call to action issued two years ago. The 2003 gap report recommended four specific actions to reduce the achievement gap in South Carolina elementary and middle schools. This year's report recommendations follow:

- Carry out all the recommendations of the *African American Student Achievement Committee Report*
(http://www.myschools.com/offices/ssys/youth_services/aasap/AASACrpt.htm)
- Focus attention on those students falling behind in school and provide for their needs as provided in the EAA:
 - ✓ Increase instructional time for these students;
 - ✓ Develop clear, effective Academic Assistance Plans for each child and rigorously fulfill the Plan;
 - ✓ Improve the literacy development of our youngest children by providing effective family literacy programs;
 - ✓ Focus our preschool intervention programs, such as the four year old child development program, on children most at risk for later school failure;

- Provide for the health and safety of all our children, with special attention to children who currently lack access to care;
- Provide strong interventions to reduce the academic weaknesses of students entering high school;
- Consider implementing the recommendations contained in the following recently reported studies:
 - ✓ *Common Ground for School Improvement (EOC, 2006c)*
 - ✓ *Report to the Governor of the South Carolina Education Reform Council (Governor's Office, 2006)*
 - ✓ *Results and Related Recommendations of the Inventory and Study of Four-Year-Old Kindergarten Programs in South Carolina (EOC, 2006b)*
 - ✓ *Report of the High School Redesign Commission (S. C. Department of Education, 2006).*

A report on South Carolina's Gifted and Talented Program was also presented at Monday's meeting, which showed that there are statistically-significant achievement gaps between students served by gifted and talented programs and those not served by these programs.

The EOC is an independent, non-partisan group made up of 18 educators, business persons, and elected officials who are appointed by legislative leaders and the governor to monitor and review the implementation of the 1998 South Carolina Education Accountability Act, the Education Improvement Act, and the K-12 system.